

CORRESPONDENCE

Positive Eugenics : A Proposal

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—I am much indebted to the six persons who have discussed, in the correspondence columns of your July and October (1946) and January (1947) numbers the proposals which I tentatively put forward in the April issue of the *EUGENICS REVIEW*. None of the writers, if I correctly understand their standpoints, regards as insuperable the obstacles which he discusses.

Four of your correspondents—Mr. Bibby, Mr. Bramwell, Dr. Grundy and Mr. Titmuss—have noted the awkward predicament which would confront the person—or group of persons—who would make an award of the kind envisaged. The predicament resides in a time factor. The more complete our information about the abilities and character of three children of the same parent, the older the children would have to be. The qualities of young children are difficult to assess and the younger the children the greater the difficulties. By the time the children were old enough to enable us to gauge their personalities, the mother would be nearing the end of her reproductive life. Dr. Grundy and Mr. Titmuss point out that only 14 per cent of Luton women, married at 25-30, had three or more children within 10-15 years of the date of their marriages.

This consideration would undoubtedly restrict the choice of parents to whom the proposed subsidy might be offered. The better the evidence in the shape of superior children which we required to satisfy our standards of superiority in the parents, the longer we would have to wait and the older the parent would necessarily be.

But the difficulty here noted would arise more from an attempt to translate the proposal into general policy than from an attempt to find a few families from which to make a small start. The parents might have married young (when the wife was under 20) and have had a first child within a year of marriage. If two more children—perhaps twins—followed within the next five years the eldest child would be about ten and the youngest about five by the time the mother was thirty. Other qualities than those exhibited by the children would be taken into account in making the award. I refer to the personal and familial characteristics of the two parents. One would be inclined to select parents who themselves came of large and stable families about the members of which something was known, who were physically good human specimens, whose home was harmonious and happy, and who were fond of children. Women are not uncommon whose natural vitality and exuberance expresses itself in an expansive love of children—in what

Dr. Spencer Patterson might call a generalized genophilia. Such women are heard saying that if they had the means they would have many children. If genophilia (an important component of fertility) is heritable, as R. A. Fisher has suggested it may be, the full reproduction of genophilic strains would yield a rich dividend in the future. Homes of genophilic parents are vital and happy. They provide the best environments wherein inborn virtues can flourish.

The point of my proposal, however, was that the innate qualities of the parents, roughly assessable early in marriage or even before marriage, could be more safely judged in the light of the qualities shown by their children. A reasonable balance would need to be struck between the two sets of considerations. If we were too exacting about the second set, demanding to see and assess more than three children, we might defeat our ends. By asking for too much we would destroy our chances of gaining anything.

Dr. Leybourne-White feels that if the selection of "eligible" parents were left to teachers, an excessive stress might be laid on mere intelligence. We should run the risk of developing the bright at the expense of the wise. She also fears that those parents who were not singled out might experience a perhaps serious psychological reaction; also that the children might suffer, though I am not clear whether she here means the children who would be beneficiaries or the others. Dr. Leybourne-White's misgivings might, I think, have some basis if the proposed benefits became widely available, and were unwisely distributed; they could hardly apply to the early and experimental phase of the proposal.

In stressing that physique should not be neglected, Dr. C. Wicksteed Armstrong has made a valuable point with which I wholly concur. But a person's physical attributes are his most obvious feature by which we are all willy-nilly much influenced. The attractiveness of a girl, the handsomeness and good physique of a man, the wholesome appearance of a child are as easily recognizable as they are commendable. I have heard examiners for University Honours degrees and Medical degrees discuss the difficulty of avoiding the bias they cause. In any selection scheme, they would and should be taken into account; the danger is that they might be taken into account too much.

My proposal has certain affinities with what Galton described as "befriending." The relationship was described in an article about Galton which appeared in the last (January 1947) issue of the *EUGENICS REVIEW*. The suggested benefit might be called a "Galton Subsidy."

C. P. BLACKER.